From: CityLab
To: Holt, David F
Subject: MapLab: Detroit, Best Mapped City?
Date: Wednesday, April 17, 2019 7:52:51 PM

Apr 17, 2019 | PRESENTED BY

Two years ago, a group of Detroit municipal leaders took a van trip around the city. Disused parks, blocked sidewalks, and decapitated street signs scrolled past the window in some of the more depopulated neighborhoods. The leaders were on a mission: to better coordinate their agencies—public works, public safety, IT, and others—towards Mayor Mike Duggan's longstanding goal of beautifying Detroit.

But when they got back to city hall, remembers Dexter Sluskarski, they realized they were missing something foundational: a shared map of the city's assets, easily accessed and updated by all.

"It used to be that one department would write a ticket for a fallen awning, but the other department wouldn't know who was responsible for cleaning it up," said Sluskarski, a GIS analyst in Detroit's department of innovation and technology. "So the goal was to get everyone on the same page."

That's when Sluskarski stepped in, and when Detroit embarked on its current journey to become the best mapped city in the U.S.

All the Detroit streets captured so far, uploaded on Mapillary. (Mapillary)

Sluskarski had previously worked at Loveland Technologies, a digital surveying startup tracking foreclosures and blight in Detroit. He was handed city cash to strap GoPro cameras to a beat-up van and drive down every street in the city, snapping pictures foot by foot. He uploaded them to Mapillary, an open-source alternative to Google Street View which links images to geographic coordinates and pastes them together into a cohesive map. Sluskarski and his team built software that allowed city officials to search for particular properties and pin

tasks to particular spots.

The beta test was a hit. So last November, Sluskarski and his team launched a scaled-up, spiffed-up version. Now the city is on an ambitious quest to create a new map every year, hitting the road with a new vehicle specially equipped with lidar and a 360-degree-view camera capable of capturing the city's streets and alleyways in minute detail. The city has uploaded 743,800 of those images to the Mapillary platform, which represents about half of the city's roughly 2,900 miles of roads.

A rear-facing view from the 360-degree camera mapping Detroit streets and alleys. (Mapillary)

The pictures, and the map, are available for anyone to peruse and use. That means regular citizens can make use of them, too—for, say, lobbying unresponsive city leaders to address unplowed snow or replace a missing street sign. In some of Detroit's most neglected areas, these aren't uncommon experiences.

Other cities are on similar missions to have a shared, digital view of their civil assets, from Clovis, New Mexico to Helsingborg, Sweden. But no other city is investing as deeply as Detroit, said Janine Yoong, the vice president of business development for Mapillary. Sluskarski said he didn't know of any other cities mapping their streets more than once. "We're thinking of this as a first- and last-seen thing," he said. "If we identify a stop sign once, we can check later to see if it's gone. We don't want people to have to complain about it—we want to do that first without having to be told."

That will be the test for this project, of course: whether the map actually translates into better city services and a higher quality of life for Detroit citizens, regardless of what neighborhood they live in.

ADVERTISEMENT

WEWORK

Can Tech Solve More Urban Problems than it Creates?

Learn what comes next with Technopolis, CityLab's new podcast.

Underwritten by WeWork. **Listen and subscribe.**

Gerrymandering, $25 billion property development edition

In case you missed it, my CityLab colleague Kriston Capps took aim at a very high-profile abuse of EB-5, a federal program that offers visas to foreigners who invest large sums of redevelopment dollars in poverty-stricken areas.

Hudson Yards, the widely despised $25 billion mega-development that recently opened on Manhattan's West Side, will now forever be the poster child for the "creative financial gerrymandering" that EB-5 has inspired, Capps writes, since that's how the project raised at least $1.2 billion of its cash.

This map, made using records obtained through FOIA, shows Hudson Yards qualifies as a distressed urban area under the EB-5 program, namely by linking the luxury development to public housing projects in Harlem. (Mark Byrnes/CityLab)

He continues:

> [...] Hudson Yards, on its own, can't qualify as a distressed urban area. However, when Congress created the EB-5 visa as a part of immigration reform legislation in 1990, lawmakers did not specify how states should draw up the geographic boundaries for a TEA.
>
> New York takes a rather liberal approach to drawing these lines. Empire State Development, the economic development agency for the New York state government, determines the boundaries for qualifying TEAs. Under state law, the agency has the authority to string together an unlimited number of census tracts in order to achieve the desired aggregate unemployment standard[...]
>
> Beyond the park, the qualifying zone for Hudson Yards captures several census tracts in Harlem, where public housing projects boost the overall unemployment figure.

In Capps' words: "Hudson Yards ate Harlem's lunch."

Mappy links

In-flight route tracking maps are about to get fancier. (Panasonic)

I feel seen: In-flight route maps are getting *even more* interesting to play with. (*Wall Street Journal*) ♦ Maps save the cathedral: Restoring Notre-Dame after this week's devastating fire could depend on a late art historian's painstakingly crafted digital scans. (*CityLab*) ♦ Nothing's free: Google Maps is moving to monetize its super-popular app. (*Bloomberg*) ♦ Cars kill: mapping where traffic pollution hurts children the most. (*CityLab*)

Questions, comments, concerns? Email me. And remember to sign up your friends for this newsletter.

See you in May!

Laura

Follow us on social media for even more CityLab content.

Were you forwarded this email? Subscribe here.

This email was sent to david.holt@okc.gov

You've signed up to receive newsletters from CityLab.

You can unsubscribe or update your preferences.

Atlantic Media · The Watergate · 600 New Hampshire Ave NW · Washington, DC 20037